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ABSTRACT

This guide, which is intended for project directors, coordinators, and other professional staff involved in developing and delivering workplace education programs, explains the role of the advisory council in the development and implementation of workplace education programs structured as partnerships between businesses and educational providers and discusses various issues surrounding the formation of advisory councils. First, advisory councils are defined as panels of experts whose function is to provide businesses and educational providers with a structure through which workplace education programs can be developed and program issues/problems can be identified and solved. Next, the role of an advisory council in the following aspects of workplace education program development/delivery are explained: critical job tasks identification, job task analysis, skills assessment, curriculum development, instruction, and evaluation. Discussed next are various considerations in forming an advisory council, including the following: determining the types of individuals to include on an advisory council; identifying the factors motivating businesses to participate in workplace education; and approaching prospective advisory council members. Concluding the guide is a list of helpful tips for working with advisory council members. (MN)

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Workplace Education Advisory Councils

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Forming the Workplace Education Advisory Council

Workplace education programs are defined as active partnerships between businesses/companies and educational providers. The operative words being *active partnerships*. This basic definition may sound simple, however, because of the working history between business and educational consultants, the expectations of these *active partnerships* may differ greatly between the two participants.

In the past, educational consultants approached business with a prepackaged or worksite program that could be implemented with little or no assistance from the business. These situations were often called *partnerships* for lack of a more appropriate term.

The nature of a workplace education program necessitates a different type of partnership. To promote a truly job-specific, integrated program, the partnership must be a collaborative effort or an *active partnership*. The development of this type of partnership is the purpose and function of the advisory council.

Many issues and questions surround the formation of an advisory council:

- What does the advisory council do?
- Who serves on the council?
- What is the time commitment of the council?
- Other

This guide will define the advisory council in terms of its functions and discuss the issues/questions listed above.

Definition:

Jorie Philippi defines the advisory panel [council] in her book *Literacy at Work* (Philippi, 1991) by highlighting its members and their requirements:

> The advisory panel should consist of people who can help select the high priority job tasks. They should be knowledgeable about current and projected job requirements, changes, problems and training. Additionally, panel members should be available to meet periodically to review the accuracy and validity of the content planned for instructional material. ...the advisory panel members are your "in house" content area experts. (1991, p.68)

Another manner in which the advisory council may be defined is through examining its responsibilities and/or functions.

An advisory council provides both the business and educational provider a structure through which the workplace education program is developed and various issues and problems are identified and solved.

Workplace Education Advisory Councils

There are several steps in the creation of a workplace education program. The following list identifies these major steps and a description of the responsibilities of the advisory council in each step. For a complete description of each of the workplace education program steps listed below, please see the corresponding guide in the *Workplace Education Program Development Notebook*.

1. Critical Job Tasks Identification

- The advisory council helps in the identification of the job categories, departments or tasks which should be targeted in the workplace education courses. The *"in house"* content area experts who serve on the advisory council will be able to direct the educational provider to those areas of the business which are experiencing the difficulties that could be associated with basic or language skills problems.

2. Job Task Analysis (JTA)

- The advisory council will facilitate the scheduling of the JTA and the *buy in* of possible participants. Members of the council facilitate *buy in* by scheduling the JTA's to meet company schedules and by arranging meetings with managers, leads and potential students throughout the JTA process.

- The advisory council assists in the collection of pertinent workplace materials. After the educational partners have conducted a JTA, they might want to request additional job specific material or documents that are of a confidential nature. The advisory council can assist in obtaining these materials and provide clearance for their use in the classroom.

3. Skills Assessment

- The advisory council will assist in identifying the company's perceptions of the skills needed on the job. It is important that both the business and educational partners understand what basic and language skills will be addressed in the workplace education program. The educational partners should bring the findings of the JTA's to the advisory council. This facilitates a common understanding and agreement of what basic and language skills are necessary on the job and what skills will be addressed in the classroom.

- The advisory council will encourage employees to express their needs. The advisory council members should represent a cross section of the business that includes employees. Employee representation should provide a direct line of communication with other employees to ensure their voices are heard.

4. Curriculum Development

- The advisory council will verify, document and expand the documentation gathered during the job task analysis.

- The advisory council ensures the curriculum is focused on performance improvement and contains valid worksite examples. Curriculum writers frequently have questions about or additional requests for workplace materials and documents. The *"in house"* content area experts are excellent resources.

5. Instruction

- The advisory council assists in scheduling classes, anticipating the number of participants, determining incentives and identifying the desired outcomes. For example, the advisory council will decide if the classes are scheduled during work hours, if class time will be paid release time, and assist in anticipating the number of participants based upon these factors.

6. Evaluation

- The advisory council aids in the formation of evaluative tools through the identification of indicators. These indicators are the problem areas the advisory council analyzed while identifying the critical job tasks. For example, if the advisory council decided to focus on shipping and receiving because of the large amount of mistakes made in filling orders, an indicator to measure program success might be to compare the mistakes in filling orders before and after the workplace education course.

This overview highlighted the common functions of the advisory council. It is important to understand the role it plays in the workplace education partnership to not only advise potential advisory council members about their duties, but to utilize this council effectively in all the developmental stages of the workplace education program as well. The next section of this guide will focus on how to form a workplace education advisory council.

Forming the Advisory Council:

When forming the advisory council, there are several key people to consider. Remember, these members will serve as your "in house" experts. The makeup of the advisory council will differ between companies due to varying company structures and organizational cultures. For example, a company that values a formal organizational structure will have stricter protocol to follow than the company with a less formal organizational structure. Your primary contact person at the company will assist you in identifying the key people. The following list will provide some ideas of who you might ask to serve on the council:

- Corporate Executive Officer (CEO)
- Union President (if applicable)
- Training personnel
- Human Resource Development personnel
- Safety or Quality managers
- Department managers
- Supervisors
- Employees
- State education agency personnel
- Other?

Creating the ideal list of potential council members may prove to be the easiest step toward forming the advisory council. The next step moves from the ideal to the reality complicated with work schedules and other possible obstacles.

Motivating prospective council members to dedicate time and energy to the advisory council can be a difficult task. The information that is presented to prospective council members should include an explanation of the council's purpose, the time commitment involved, the level of participation required, and the expertise that each member will provide. Moreover, providing this information to potential council members will prevent possible misunderstandings from occurring.

This is important information, however, it does not necessarily motivate prospective members to commit their time and energy to the workplace education effort. How can you generate interest and gain commitment from potential members? Assessing the potential members' needs may provide the answer.

As an adult educator, you are accustomed to utilizing a needs assessment with your students. The needs assessment not only provides you with valuable information but also identifies the students' goals and objectives that act as motivating factors to learning. Similarly, assessing the work-related goals and objectives of the potential advisory council members can provide you with the motivating factors that will generate commitment to the advisory council and *buy in* to the entire workplace education program.

There are obvious differences between the motivating factors and goals of adult educators and their business counterparts. Adult educators often view the more subjective issues such as "quality of life" or "enhancing students' educational opportunities" as the motivating factors in their careers. In business the above issues are no less important, however, frequently, more tangible immediate goals and objectives take precedence. Understanding these differences is important because it facilitates communication between educators and business people. For example, in speaking with a business person about enhancing educational opportunities, an educator might focus the conversation on how these opportunities will in turn benefit the company. In doing so the educator has expressed an understanding of the benefits to the employee and employer.

To identify the motivating factors of the business community look at the issues that directly affect the prospective advisory council members. The following list incorporates some of these issues:

- productivity
- quality
- job performance
- absenteeism
- turnover rate
- safety
- return on investment
- bottom line

A customized, integrated workplace education program can impact one or all of these areas depending on the needs expressed by the employer. For example, teaching the computation skills necessary in filling customers' orders will impact productivity and the quality of customer service; both which impact the bottom line in the end.

Once you have identified how the workplace education program will impact the employees and the workplace, you can explain to prospective council members how their participation will help to ensure the effectiveness of the workplace education program.

For instance, while speaking to line supervisors about their participation on the council, you might want to mention that their input will help to ensure that the curriculum addresses those basic skills that will help avoid rework and other issues that cost their departments money. A statement that directly addresses the issues which are important to potential council members can demonstrate the importance of their *active participation*.

A company needs assessment that is given to these key individuals prior to the formation of your advisory council, will identify the needs or concerns that these potential council members have. Using a needs assessment which asks *"open-ended"* questions, allows the potential member to express many concerns and issues. Two possible open-ended questions are listed below:

- "How do you measure the impact of current training provided to your employees?"
- "What job performance issues concern you the most? Why?"

Answering these questions requires more than one word and allows for additional information to be given.

This needs assessment will be used in later workplace education program developmental steps. For example, information collected from this needs assessment might be used in identifying the critical job tasks as noted by the business partner. Additionally, the needs assessment will provide you with information to refer to when customizing curriculum and developing the evaluative instruments to measure program impact. Again, your key contact person will assist you in identifying who will fill out a needs assessment.

Approaching Prospective Advisory Council Members

How you approach prospective advisory council members will greatly depend on the organizational culture of the company. If a company uses relatively informal methods of communication (e.g. meeting in the hallway) you may have the opportunity to meet face to face with each member or schedule an open house on site. In contrast if a company culture calls for formal written communication, an explanatory memorandum, brochure, and/or letter might be necessary, or more formal presentations could be the company norm. Your company contact person may arrange a meeting of prospective members in which you can present the workplace education program components and request assistance. Each of these methods is affective if matched with the appropriate cultural norms.

Your contact person should assist you in deciding who to approach and what type of approach(es) will be most effective in contacting potential members. For additional information about how to read a company's culture, refer to the guide in this series, *Understanding Organizational Culture*.

Helpful Tips:

- Be sure to explain to the prospective advisory council members why you need them to participate and what expertise they can contribute to the workplace education program.
- Be certain that those who agree to serve on the advisory council know the level of participation that the job entails.
- Allow ample time between the notification and convening of your first meeting to maximize attendance.
- Circulate agenda items and requests for input, prior to all meetings in order to facilitate efficient use of meeting time.
- Establish a regular communication procedure with all advisory board members *in writing*.

For more information and ideas about forming workplace education advisory councils, please call the Office of Adult Education (OAE). As always, the OAE will provide technical assistance or training to facilitate your workplace education efforts.

For assistance contact: Jennifer Burkhart
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Bibliography

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